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STARS AND STRIPES.

Thursday, September 2, 2004

Brigadier general in Germany is first female West Point grad to reach rank

By **Marni McEntee**, Stars and Stripes

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PANZER KASERNE, Germany — In 1977, Rebecca Halstead became one of the first women admitted to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

On Tuesday, Halstead made another indelible mark on history, becoming the first female West Point graduate to achieve the rank of general officer.

Halstead, deputy commanding general of the 21st Theater Support Command in Kaiserslautern, was promoted to the rank of brigadier general. On Thursday, she moves to her new post as commanding general of the 3rd Corps Support Command in Wiesbaden.

"Somebody had to be first and who better? No one could have been better in my mind," said retired Maj. Gen. Dewitt Irby during Halstead's frocking ceremony at Panzer Kaserne's parade ground.

"In every instance, she has made an example for all to emulate. She has truly been a trendsetter in the Army," Irby said.

Irby, whom Halstead called her mentor and occasional "tormentor," and Halstead's father, Richard, pinned



Marni McEntee / S&S

Second Lt. Robert Tarr of the 529th Military Police Co. presents Brig. Gen. Rebecca Halstead with a ceremonial shell after an 11-gun salute from 105-mm Howitzer's at Halstead's promotion ceremony Tuesday.



Marni McEntee / S&S

Retired Maj. Gen. Dewitt

a single star on each of her lapels. Her nephew, Joseph Barron, placed her Kevlar helmet with the new brigadier general's rank insignia on her head. And her mother, Betty Jeanne Halstead, helped her snap on a ceremonial gunbelt.

Halstead graduated from West Point in 1981, the second graduating class that included women. Women were first admitted to the academy in 1976, and today they make up 15 percent of the school's 4,000 students, according to the academy Web site.

Halstead, 45, of Willseyville, N.Y., credited her mother for pointing her in the direction of the academy, after seeing a newspaper story that the school had opened its doors to women.

Since then, she has risen swiftly through the ranks, having been promoted four times "below the zone," or earlier than average.

Col. Susan Sowers, commander of the Kaiserslautern-based 37th Transportation Command, who graduated from West Point the year after Halstead, said Halstead has always been dedicated to the Army and her soldiers. The two served as company commanders together at Fort Lewis, Wash., 18 years ago.

"She is, without a doubt, one of the best leaders I have ever met," said Sowers, 44, of Tacoma, Wash.

Sowers noted that women have indeed come a long way in the military. During the U.S. invasion of Grenada, for example, women platoon leaders were yanked back behind the lines after they jumped into the conflict zone, Sowers said.

"There are no front lines or rear lines anymore," Sowers said. "The reality of warfare has helped diminish the gender gap. Women are proving themselves one way or the other, whether the American public is ready or not."

First Lt. Marisa Pace, a 2001 academy graduate, said she related to Halstead's speech because the two came from similar backgrounds.

"It motivates me to go back to my job and do the best I can," said Pace, executive officer of 37th Transportation Command's Headquarters and Headquarters Company. "Maybe one day, I can make it to one-star," said Pace, 26, of Queens, N.Y.

Irby, left, and Richard Halstead, pin stars on Col. Rebecca Halstead's lapels, promoting her to brigadier general. Halstead, who will be deputy commanding general of the 3rd Corps Support Command in Wiesbaden, Germany, is the first female West Point graduate to become a general officer.

Halstead said she only had a couple of pieces of advice for women coming up in the ranks: "Number one, don't quit. Number two, refer back to number one," she said.

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